

NAXOS

ROSSINI

Complete Overtures • 3

La Cenerentola

L'Italiana in Algeri • Tancredi



Prague Sinfonia Orchestra • Christian Benda

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868): Complete Overtures • 3

Gioachino Antonio Rossini, one of the most successful and popular operatic composers of his time, was born in Pesaro in 1792. His father, a brass-player, had a modest career, disturbed by the political changes of the period as the French replaced the Austrians in Northern Italy. Rossini's mother was a singer and as a boy Rossini appeared with his father in the pit orchestra and from time to time as a singer with his mother on stage, going on to work as a keyboard-player in the opera orchestra. Rossini's early studies in music were with his father and mother, and with other teachers through the generosity of rich patrons. In childhood he had already started to show ability as a composer and his experience in the opera-house bore natural fruit in a remarkable and meteoric career that began in 1810 with the production of *La cambiale di matrimonio* in Venice.

There followed a series of operas, comic and tragic, ending with *Semiramide* in Venice in 1823, the last of his operas for Italy. There had been attractive offers from abroad, and successful visits to Vienna and to London, but he now turned his attention to Paris. Under the Bourbon King Charles X Rossini staged French versions of earlier works and in 1829 *Guillaume Tell*. A contract for further operas came to nothing when the King was replaced in the revolution of 1830 by Louis-Philippe, although eventually, after some six years, Rossini was able to have his agreed annuity restored. With matters settled in France, in 1836 he returned to Italy and in spite of ill health concerned himself with the affairs of the Liceo Musicale in Bologna. The revolutionary disturbances there in 1848, activities with which he had little sympathy, seemed to threaten him and his second wife, Olympe Pélissier, whom he had married in 1846, after the death of his first wife, the singer Isabella Colbran, from whom he had been legally separated since 1837. For his own safety he moved first to Florence, but in 1855, partly in a search for better health, returned to Paris. In that city and a few years later at his new villa at Passy he passed the rest of his life.

Rossini's opera *Maometto II* (Mehmed II) was originally written for Naples in 1820 in a version that

offered a new structure. Two years later the work had to be revised for performance at La Fenice in Venice, where a more conventional form was expected. The opera is set in 1476, at the time of the fall of the Venetian colony of Negroponte to the Turks. The Venetian governor Paolo Erisso intends his daughter Anna to marry Calbo, but she loves Uberto, whom she had met in Corinth. Uberto turns out to be Mehmed II in disguise. Anna suffers a conflict between duty and love, choosing the former in marriage to Calbo and final death by her own hand as the Turkish forces storm Negroponte. For performance in Venice Rossini substituted a happy ending, with victory for the Venetian soldiers.

The opening *Sinfonia* for Venice starts with a slow introduction, marked *Maestoso* and taken from a scene in which Calbo and Paolo Erisso are in the catacombs. It continues with an *Allegro* that uses themes from the opera. In 1826 Rossini reworked the opera for Paris as *Le siège de Corinthe* (The Siege of Corinth), the action shifted to a Greek city to fit contemporary political circumstances.

It was in 1813, relatively early in his career, that Rossini wrote *L'italiana in Algeri* (The Italian Girl in Algiers) for the Teatro San Benedetto in Venice.

Mustafa, the Bey of Algiers, wishes to rid himself of his wife Elvira, and plans to marry her off to his favourite, the enslaved Italian Lindoro. He tells Haly, Captain of the Algerian corsairs, to find him an Italian girl. Lindoro, meanwhile, is in love with Isabella, who is taken prisoner by Haly, with her elderly companion Taddeo, who now pretends to be her uncle. Lindoro is offered his freedom to return to Italy, if he will take Elvira with him. Isabella and Lindoro recognise each other, and she refuses the advances of the Bey, demanding that Lindoro, as an Italian, should be ordered to stay with her. The Bey tries to persuade Isabella to accept him, promoting Taddeo to a high court position, but Isabella uses trickery, notably the invention of a ceremony of the Order of Pappatici, to which the Bey may be admitted, if he can pass the test of silence. The ceremony is used as a cover for the escape of Isabella and Lindoro, who are finally forgiven by the

Bey, now reconciled to his wife, admitting that he has been outwitted by the Italian girl.

The opera, which retains a firm place in international operatic repertoire, has a lively overture, which opens *Andante*, with plucked strings, accompanying an oboe melody, before an *Allegro*, its second subject entrusted, as so often, to wind instruments.

La Cenerentola (Cinderella) was first staged in Rome in 1817. In a slightly different form of the fairy-tale, Cenerentola shows kindness to the philosopher Alidoro, tutor to the Prince, Don Ramiro, who calls at the castle of Cenerentola's step-father, Don Magnifico, Baron of Monte Fiascone, in the guise of a beggar. Alidoro advises Don Ramiro that here is a girl worthy of his hand. The ugly sisters and Don Magnifico are ready to attend a ball at the palace, while it is Alidoro who comes to the aid of Cenerentola and takes her there, after a scene in which Dandini, the Prince's valet, and the Prince have changed places. Continuing the same imposture, Dandini, as the Prince, greets Don Magnifico at Don Ramiro's country-house, and appoints him court vintner, while the Prince and his valet cannot understand Alidoro's praise of Don Magnifico's daughter, seeing only the two ugly sisters. Cenerentola admits that she prefers the Prince's servant, the real Prince, who now reveals to her his true identity. She gives him a bracelet that matches her own and tells him to find her, once she has gone. Forced by a storm to seek shelter in Don Magnifico's castle, the Prince recognises Cenerentola, who seeks forgiveness for her step-father and step-sisters. The opera ends in Don Ramiro's palace, where Cenerentola is finally enthroned, as she deserves. Rossini is said to have written the opera in three weeks. The overture, borrowed from the recently composed *La gazzezza*, is a popular concert item. It opens with an introductory *Maestoso*, leading, as expected, to an *Allegro vivace*, its second theme introduced by the clarinet, to return in recapitulation with piccolo and bassoon. The movement largely follows Rossini's usual practice, a modified use of sonata-form, a slow introduction, an *Allegro* with two contrasting themes, a second usually entrusted to wind instruments, a recapitulation and a coda.

Rossini presumably wrote his *Grand'ouverture 'obbligata a contrabbasso'* during his student years in Bologna. In spite of the reference to the double bass, the work seems to have no connection with Rossini's early patron, the amateur double bass player Agostino Triossi, for whom he wrote his *String Sonatas*. The unusual features of the *Overture* are fully discussed by Philip Gossett¹, who draws attention to the composer's attempts at counterpoint. The work, at all events, offers the immediate attractions of lively melodic writing, after the more ominous slow opening.

Matilde di Shabran, ossia Bellezza, e cuor di ferro (Matilde of Shabran, or Beauty, and heart of iron), a two-act *melodramma giocoso*, was first mounted in Rome in 1821. Matilde succeeds in dominating the misogynist Duke Corradino, entrusted with her care after the death of her father. Corradino's autocratic behaviour, with the machinations of the Contessa d'Arco, who has designs on him, create complications, which are surmounted once he realises what has really been happening. This leads him to contemplate suicide, from which he is saved by the intervention of the heroine and her companions. The overture, taken from that for *Eduardo e Cristina* [8.570934], follows Rossini's usual pattern, its second theme linked to the opera, and, as always, with originality in orchestration and nuances within the structure, its recapitulation tantalisingly introduced.

A witty comedy, *La cambiale di matrimonio* (The Bill of Marriage) was Rossini's first opera for the professional stage, seen first at the Teatro San Moise in Venice in 1810. Tobias Mill, a rich English merchant, agrees to marry his daughter Fanny to a Canadian, Mr Slook, whom he has never seen. Fanny, however, has given her heart to the young and impoverished Edward Milfort. The comedy develops when Slook, in colonial garb, with manners to suit, arrives and is confronted by Milfort, who is anxious to prevent the match, and by Mill, who is determined to enforce the contract. All ends well, as Slook makes Fanny over to Milfort. The overture, derived from Rossini's *Overture in E flat* of the previous year, is heard with some frequency in the concert-hall. It opens *Andante maestoso*, with a horn solo, followed by an *Allegro vivace*,

its first subject presented by the strings, leading to the second theme, from flute and clarinet, with intervention by the horn in E flat, the unusual initial key of the second subject.

Rossini's *Tancredi*, regarded by Stendhal as his masterpiece, was staged in Ferrara soon after the first 1813 performance in Venice, but now, exceptionally, with a tragic ending, following the play by Voltaire on which it is based. Set in eleventh century Syracuse, it deals with the secret return from exile of the knight Tancredi, his love for Amenaide, daughter of the leader of Syracuse, betrothed by her father to another. In the original version Tancredi is victorious against his enemies and united with Amenaide, while in the revised version Tancredi is killed, united with her only on his deathbed. The opening *Sinfonia*, an

exciting introduction, is borrowed from the overture to *La pietra del paragone*. The slow introduction, marked *Andante marcato*, duly leads to an *Allegro*, its first theme initially entrusted to the strings, followed, after a dramatic transition, by the second theme, introduced by flute and clarinet, soon joined by the bassoon. A characteristic *crescendo* is followed by a recapitulation, the second theme now initiated by the oboe and first violins, leading in due course to the final coda.

Keith Anderson

¹ Philip Gossett, 'The Overtures of Rossini', 19th Century Music, iii, 1979-80, pp. 25-27

Also available



8.570933



8.570934

Prague Sinfonia Orchestra



During the celebrations of the Czech National Day, the former President of the Czech Republic Václav Havel became Honorary President of the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra in a gala concert under Christian Benda at the Czech National House in New York City. After having collaborated with conductors such as Václav Neumann, Gerd Albrecht, Charles Mackerras, Trevor Pinnock and, for over ten years with Christian Benda, its chief conductor and artistic director, the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra was established for the symphonic repertoire during Prague Chamber Orchestra's sixteenth tour of North America. The orchestra has toured widely throughout the world, and is a regular participant of Czech musical life, with concert series in Prague and participation in festivals such as Salzburg, Bregenz, Berlin, Dresden, Lucerne, Montreux, Cheltenham, Besançon, and Biarritz. Solo artists performing with the orchestra have included Maxim Vengerov, Arturo Benedetti-Michelangeli, Friedrich Gulda, Emil Gilels, Henryk Szeryng, Mischa Maisky, and Christoph Eschenbach. Recordings for companies including RCA, EMI, Decca, Sony Classics, Naxos, Polydor, Nippon Columbia, Denon, BMG, Telarc, Ariola, Eurodisc and Supraphon have won a number of prestigious prizes, including the Wiener Flötenuhr, the Grand Prix du Disque Académie Charles Cros twice, and, after having sold one million records, the Golden Disc Award.

Christian Benda



Christian Benda is descended from a long line of musicians. First guest conductor of the Turin Philharmonic, he appears worldwide with orchestras including the Prague Symphony, Shanghai Philharmonic, Orchestra della Toscana, I Pomeriggi Musicali, Polish National Opera, Budapest Concert Orchestra MÁV, Cyprus State, Moscow Virtuosi, Sinfonieorchester Münster, Ulster Orchestra, Orquestra Sinfónica do Estado de São Paulo, and Suisse Romande Orchestra, and is invited by festivals such as Schwetzingen, Echternach/Luxemburg, Cité de la musique Paris, Prague Spring, George Enescu Bucharest, Hong Kong Arts, Klangbogen Wien, and the Menuhin Festival in Switzerland. Christian Benda is chief conductor and artistic director of the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra with which he has recorded numerous standard classical works, as well as the complete overtures of Schubert [Naxos 8.570328-29] and Rossini. Singers such as Renée Fleming, Barbara Hendricks, Cheryl Studer, and Simon Estes have appeared under his baton. In collaboration with the Vienna State Opera he has devised a new introduction to opera for the general public and young people, *High-Lights and Micro-Opera*, based on Goethe's colour theory, with the participation of narrator and dancers.



Volume 3 of the complete Rossini symphonic overtures continues the pattern of placing rarities such as the lively student work, *Grand'ouverture 'obbligata a contrabasso'*, and *Matilde of Shabran*, set in medieval Spain, alongside perennial hits such as *The Italian Girl in Algiers* and *La Cenerentola* (Cinderella), said to have been written in just three weeks. *ClassicsToday.com* described Volume 2 (8.570934) of this series as “delightful ... amazing ... strongly recommended”.

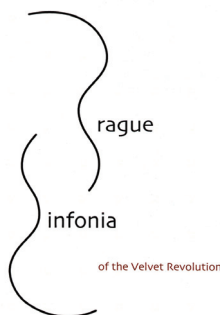


Gioachino
ROSSINI
(1792-1868)



Complete Overtures • 3

- | | | |
|----------|--|--------------|
| 1 | Maometto II
(1822 Venice version) | 11:15 |
| 2 | L'Italiana in Algeri | 8:01 |
| 3 | La Cenerentola | 8:09 |
| 4 | Grand'ouverture
'obbligata a contrabbasso' | 7:14 |
| 5 | Matilde di Shabran, ossia
Bellezza, e cuor di ferro | 9:30 |
| 6 | La cambiale di matrimonio | 5:27 |
| 7 | Tancredi | 6:06 |



Prague Sinfonia Orchestra • Christian Benda

Recorded at Kulturní dům Barikádníků, Prague, Czech Republic, on 5th and 6th September, 2011 (tracks 2-3), and at Produkční dům Vzlet, Prague, on May 30th and 31st, 2012 (tracks 1, 4-7)

Producer: Kateřina Chobotová • Engineer: Michael Rast • Booklet notes: Keith Anderson
Sponsored by Etoile d'Azur – Help with Art, the Václav Havel Library and Produkční dům Vzlet
Cover image by Uguniga (Dreamstime.com)